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ABSTRACT

This document presents a guide to help 4-H Club leaders understand the stresses afffecting club members and work to strengthen individual and family coping skills. Economic, social, political, and psychological changes which may have a profound impact on rural and farm families are cited as sources of stress. Leaders are provided with a framework for viewing stress; a discussion of youth stresses; and a list of children's reactions to stress, including anger or violence, withdrawal or isolation, fear, extreme obedience, or subtle changes. Eight characteristics of families and individuals who cope best with change and stresses are identified: (1) effective family communication; (2) ability to work together and encourage independence; (3) encouragement of positive self-esteem; (4) family pride and time for family activities; (5) family as a support network for members; (6) a willingness to accept temporary help from outsiders; (7) flexibility in family roles; and (8) problem-solving skills. Eight ways that 4-H Club leaders can help club members cope with stress are listed, and the role of the 4-H Club programs is briefly described. Lesson plans for educational programs are provided which include information on materials needed and a step-by-step teaching plan. The lessons described feature learn-by-doing activities that can help individuals and families strengthen their resources for coping with stress. (NB)

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Juanita J. Reed

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

Rural Minnesota is undergoing economic, social, political, and psychological changes which are creating a profound impact upon families. In addition, many Minnesota farm families are experiencing extreme financial difficulties. These changes and pressures create a crisis situation for the entire family, as foreclosures, bankruptcy, voluntary liquidation, and limited borrowing power force families to abandon their farms and dramatically alter their accustomed lifestyles.

Some families do manage to continue farm living, but even they must often alter their lifestyles. They may, for example, change from a one-earner family to a two-earner family, or both adults may take additional full- or part-time jobs off the farm.

These sorts of changes can cause stress, and this stress has implications for individual families and community 4-H Clubs. As a 4-H leader, you need to be aware of the stresses that are affecting your 4-H members and seek ways within your 4-H Club to strengthen individual and family coping skills.

This guide will:

1) Give you a framework for viewing stress and children's reactions to stress.
2) Identify characteristics of families who cope successfully with change.
3) Provide teaching guides to be used with programs in the local 4-H Club which will help youths and their parents develop and strengthen these coping skills.

A Framework for Viewing Stress

One way to look at stress is the "A + B + C = X" model developed by University of Minnesota Regents' Professor Rueben Hill. In this model, "X" is the crisis or stressful event, "A" is the event itself, "B" is the family's or individual's resources available to meet the crisis, and "C" is the perception the family or individual has of the situation. In most cases, a 4-H leader will not have control over the event itself, but your influence can be helpful to club members and families in the "B" and "C" parts of the equation, resources and perception.

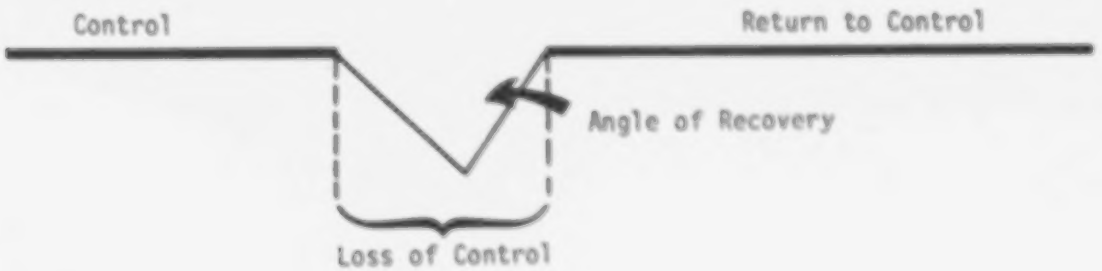
Resources are the psychological, social, interpersonal, and material characteristics and skills of individual members of the family unit and the community which may be brought into play to reduce tension and manage conflicts.

Self-esteem and the ability to provide food and shelter, pay bills, and work are examples of individual resources. Family resources are such things as role flexibility, communication skills, and family unity. Community resources include services and information from any group or person outside the family. This includes social support, which is important if one is to feel cared about, valued, and part of a network in which responsibilities are shared. Social support may come from the extended family, neighborhoods, churches, or self-help groups. The Community 4-H Club is another significant source of social support.

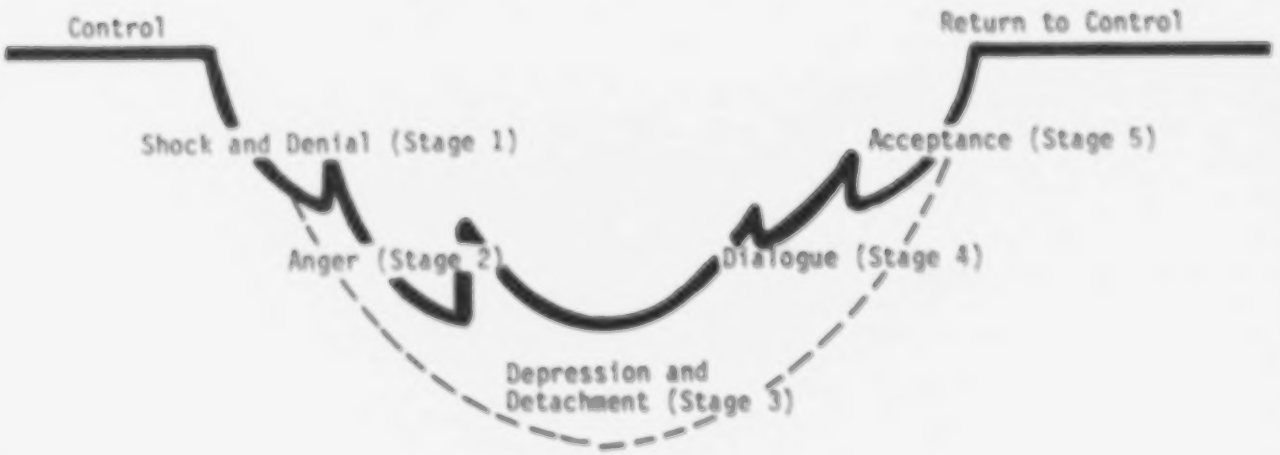
Perception refers to how one defines the situation. This differs from family to family and the individual family's perception plays a crucial role in determining how they are likely to deal with stress. It's important to realize that perceptions can be changed, and changing the way one looks at a crisis often reveals new resources that might be available to resolve it. For example, a member could drop out of a clothing project if she/he believed that having the best quality wool was a necessity. The leader could help to resolve the situation by challenging the member's perception of quality.

Youth Stress

The impact of a major change or stress experience triggers a "roller-coaster" effect in individual members and their families. The effect can be diagrammed like this:



The following diagram gives a more detailed picture of this period of loss of control, showing the five specific stages and typical reactions at each stage:



Here are typical reactions at each stage. Children may go back and forth among them, but will progress toward recovery.

	INTERNAL FEELINGS	EXTERNAL SIGNS
Stage 1	Shock and Denial	Dazed, dull look; refuses to admit a loss has occurred; may appear overly involved.
Stage 2	Anger	May become upset easily; may behave aggressively; seems more agitated.
Stage 3	Depression and Detachment	Headaches and stomach aches; eating and sleeping disturbances; sadness and crying; unable to plan, reason, or be logical; very tired; diminished social interactions; attempts to protect self from further loss.
Stage 4	Dialogue	Starts talking to trusted people; asks, "What's going to happen to me now?"
Stage 5	Acceptance	Feels more control; has mostly "good" days; takes risks again; more social interests.

Children's Reactions to Stress

Children react to stress in various ways and their reactions may be different at different times. Some reactions that may be exhibited by club members are:

1) **Anger or violence.** The child displays inappropriate aggressive, hostile, "edgy", destructive, or verbally abusive behavior.
2) **Withdrawn, isolated.** The member may withdraw from active participation and be noticeably inattentive.
3) **Fear.** Member may show signs of fear, may not want to participate in new activities or those that involve risk-taking.
4) **Extreme obedience.** The member believes that if he/she is "good", everything will be okay again.
5) **Subtle changes.** The member overeats or shows consistent loss of appetite, begins to bite his/her nails, or stutters.

Coping Successfully With the Stresses of Change

Coping with change is usually not something we do in isolation. Research done by McCubbin, Boss, and Pitzer suggests that families and individuals who cope best with change and stresses have these characteristics:

1) Effective communication between family members, including the expression of feelings. This means they are encouraged to discuss any topic or express any feeling within the family and are listened to and accepted.
2) The ability to work and play together as a family, while at the same time encouraging individual family members to do things on their own.
3) Positive self-esteem is encouraged. Praise and recognition are given and received on a continuing basis.
4) Pride in the family and priority time for family activities. Time is spent together on a regular basis. Family time is an important time.
5) The family acts as a support network for its members. Most of these families prefer the support of family and close friends in times of trouble.
6) A willingness to accept temporary help from outsiders. These families are open to suggestions and sources of information that may be of help.
7) Flexibility in family roles. Family members are willing to share responsibility for some roles and take turns performing others. They don't get stuck in patterns. If the wife/mother goes to work outside the home, other family members help out around the house or do the shopping. The husband/father might cook dinner or care for the children in the evening rather than send them elsewhere.
8) Problem-solving skills. Problems are resolved as they arise. There are no unresolved issues to add to the stress of daily life.

Opportunities to Help

As a 4-H leader in the community club, you have many opportunities within the club setting to help individual youths and their families cope with the stresses of change and economic hardship. You are a "significant other" to the young members of your 4-H Club, and as such you can provide direction and guidance.

Here are some of the ways you can help individual members in your club:

1) Talk about coping and how you or others have survived losses and can help. This establishes your credibility.
2) Let your members know you care.
3) Listen to members in a non-judgmental way when they discuss their concerns.
4) Provide reassurance to members. Let them know that there are ways to reestablish control of their lives.
5) Help members to eliminate guilt feelings. Assure them that they didn't cause the problem.
6) Try to eliminate unnecessary stressors for members. Give them plenty of time to complete projects. Provide as many success experiences with appropriate recognition as possible.
7) Answer members' questions as honestly as you can.
8) Give reassurances that no matter what happens, the member does not face this crisis alone, that help is available.

Too often we shun those who are hurt because we don't know what to say or how to respond to their needs. "Shunning" can contribute to stress or trauma for the individual and cause them to withdraw or isolate themselves even more. What most children and adults need or want during stressful times is someone to listen to them, someone to share their thoughts and feelings. It may be done with a gesture, a pat on the back, a hug, or a simple "How are things going?" Sometimes a statement such as, "I'm really feeling mixed up today, how do you feel?", can be a conversation starter.

4-H Club Programs

The community club can serve as a support base for families in times of stress by providing a contact group with neighbors and friends. Encourage family activities which are economical and provide opportunities for fun and social interaction. Potluck suppers, Halloween parties, Valentine parties, and box socials are good examples of activities that can involve the whole family.

Educational programs at monthly club meetings can focus on communication skills, building self-esteem, and learning about family roles. In addition, project work that helps members learn farm and homemaking skills and leisure-time activities aids in the development of members' coping abilities.

In the following section of this manual are leader's guides or lesson plans for educational programs that can be conducted at monthly community club meetings. Each lesson provides you, the leader, with information on materials needed and a step-by-step teaching plan. These lessons feature learn-by-doing activities that will help individuals and families strengthen their resources for coping with stress.

References

1. Kysor, Ardis and Elizabeth Overstad. "Helping Young Children Cope With Crisis." St. Paul, MN: Toys-n-Things Press, 1979.
2. McCubbin, H.D., et al. "Family Stress and Coping Decade Review,"in Journal of Marriage and the Family.
3. Schnittzer, Marilyn. Child Stress for Education. Ames,Iowa: Iowa State University.
4. Helping Families Cope With the Stress of Change. Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University, 1981.

Other Resources

Books for children:

1. Wilt, Joy. Tuff Stuff. A children's book about trauma. Waco, Texas: Educational Products Division, Word, Inc.

Leader's Guide

4-H CLUB MEETING ACTIVITY GUIDE

Shunning

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Purpose

1. To help members become aware of the impact of shunning an individual.
2. To help members develop life skills by relating to others who are "hurting".

Supplies Needed

Group(s) of 6-10 people

Background for the Leader

Reaching out to others who are dealing with trauma or stress is one of the most important ways to help. Too often we shun or ignore those who are hurting because we don't know what to say or how to respond. Shunning can contribute to stress or trauma for the individual and cause them to withdraw or isolate themselves even more.

Conducting the Learning Activity

1. Divide the club into groups of 6-10; assign to each group a junior leader or adult who has been briefed on the activity ahead of time.

2. Each group should select a topic to discuss that the whole group knows something about and could discuss; e.g., a club hayride or skating party.

3. Two members of the group are asked to leave the room to get paper to write down ideas.

4. While the two people are out of the room, the leader instructs the group that they will ignore one person and agree with the other person when they return.

5. Group members should use words and body language to agree and ignore.

6. After a period of time, the leader halts the discussion and the group discusses what has taken place.

7. Discussion:

   a. How did each of the two who left feel when they returned? Why?
   b. How did people react to them? (Facial expressions, eye contact, etc.)
   c. What did people do to show shunning?
   d. What are examples of times when we tend to shun people (death, divorce, foreclosure) Why?
   e. What effect does shunning have on people's feelings? What could we do instead?

8. Other discussion or role-play situations and interventions:

   a. A boy or girl of your own age, who is a close friend, appears to be very upset for some reason unknown to you. What do you do?

   b. Your father or mother appears to be very upset, angry, or moody for some reason unknown to you. What do you do?

   c. You know that your best friend is doing something which is causing him or her to suffer. What do you do?

   d. An adult is critical of your parents in their absence. What do you do?

   e. A girl you know sometimes says cruel and bitter things about you. What could you do?

   f. You go out for the day with a friend who becomes silent and gloomy and will not say what is wrong. What do you do?

9. In discussion, emphasize the feelings people experience during trauma. Remind members that the hurt created by a stress doesn't go away easily. We feel angry, sad, lonely, and scared. We may think nobody loves us or that something terrible is going to happen to us. We may think we are a bad person or that we will never be happy again.

10. Encourage members to share traumatic experiences they have had and how they were treated. Who helped them.

11. Encourage members to talk about their thoughts and feelings. Suggest that when they talk to someone that they make sure of the following:

    a. They have time to talk and the other person has time to listen.

    b. The person they talk to cares about them and might be able to help.

    c. They tell the other person exactly how they feel and what they are thinking.

Summarize

Big Idea

1. Shunning a person can be very painful.

2. We all need each other - people need people for help and support during tough times.

Leader's Guide

4-H CLUB MEETING ACTIVITY GUIDE

Appreciating the Strengths and Uniqueness of Each Family Member

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Purpose

To help members of the family become more aware of the strengths and uniqueness of each person and how that uniqueness can enrich the experiences they share as a family.

Materials

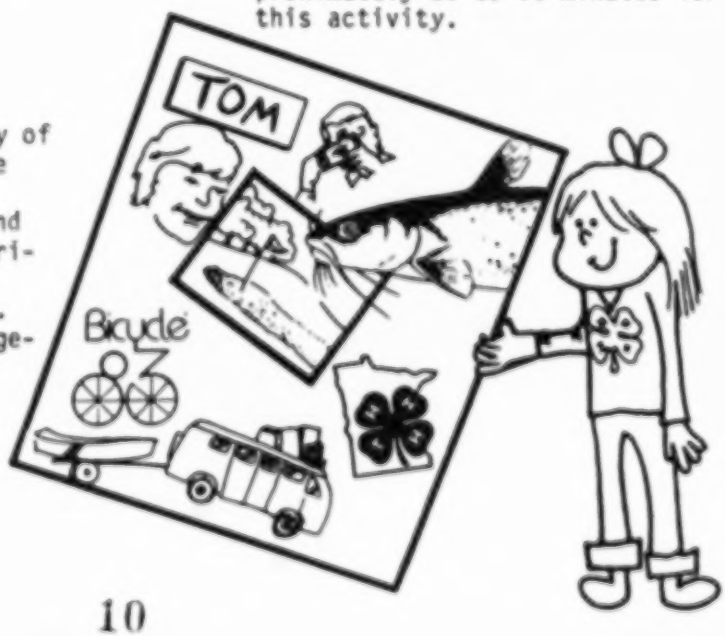
1. A stack of old magazines that can be cut up.
2. Rubber cement, glue, or paste.
3. Scissors.
4. Card stock or cardboard. A piece for each member of the family. 12 X 14 inches (30.5 x 35.5 cm) would make a good size.
5. A special treat to be shared by the family members would be appropriate.

Background for the Leader

High self-esteem is the most critical variable in the ability of individuals and families to cope with the "tough stuff" of life. Showing appreciation, praise, and recognition for the unique contributions of each family member contributes to high self-esteem. All family members need encouragement and skills to celebrate individual strengths.

Conducting the Learning Activity

1. Share with the family the purpose of this activity. (See above) Emphasize that your goal is to look for the positive aspects of each person's uniqueness.
2. Get the magazines, scissors, glue, and cardboard and place them on the table or in a place where all members can reach them.
3. Instruct each person to thumb through the magazines and look for pictures or words describing a strength or unique characteristic of one of the family members. When they find something, have them cut it out and place it on a board with that person's name. Don't glue it at this point; allow approximately 20 to 30 minutes for this activity.



4. Work until there are a good number of pictures and descriptive words depicting the uniqueness of each family member. You are now ready to arrange them into a collage on the cardboard. Focus on one person at a time, talking about the uniqueness of that person as you build the collage. Cement the pieces on as you build the collage.

5. After the collages are complete, have each person hold his/her collage, then have family members share how that person's uniqueness enriches the experiences they share as a family.

Summarize

Big Ideas

1. Each person is special and unique.

2. We need the special things about each person to make our family complete.

*Adapted from Nebraska EC 23-20-78

Leader's Guide

4-H CLUB MEETING ACTIVITY GUIDE

Who Does What?

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Purpose

1. To help members identify different roles in the family
2. To help members become aware of who does what tasks
3. To help members explore ways those roles and tasks could change

Supplies Needed

1. Pencils
2. Chart for each member
3. Magic markers
4. 5 x 7 inch cards with tasks
5. Masking tape

Background for the Leader

One of the resources that helps families cope with stress is flexibility in family roles. Family members are willing to share responsibility for some roles and take turns performing others. They don't get stuck in patterns. For example, if the wife/mother goes to work outside the home, other family members might help more around the house or with the shopping. The husband/father might cook dinner, help with the laundry, or take on more child care responsibilities.

Children in the family need to be encouraged to take on new responsibilities or think of ways to "even the load" for all family members.

Conducting the Learning Activity

1. Introduce the topic:

   In our families we all have jobs or roles that we need to carry out. Most families develop a pattern of how they do things and who does what, but sometimes when there are changes in families--when someone is sick, for example, or if mom goes to work or dad has a different job or you move--these jobs change.

   Let's have some fun tonight looking at families and how jobs get done.

   To do this, we'll divide into groups and make believe you are a family.

Note to Leader - Divide club into family groups. Assign a junior leader to coordinate each group and have them work with the group to determine family make-up. Be sure that all types of families are represented - single-parent, grandparent in family, etc.

Give each group a set of 3 x 5 cards with family tasks. (Use list of tasks on worksheet.) Using the masking tape, tape the card on the person who does the task.

2. Discussion:

   a) What does each person look like?

   b) Do some family members have too many jobs? Who are they?

   c) What could be changed?

   d) Suppose the mother goes to work; who could take some of he jobs?

   e) Suppose dad takes a job in town; what could happen to his household jobs?

   f) The older brother goes away to college; then what happens?

3. Let's look at your own family - Use the work sheet to think about tasks in your family and who does them? Does someone have too much to do? How can you help?

Summarize

Big ideas

1. Every family has jobs and tasks to be done.

2. Most families have a "visual" way or "routine" way of determining "who does what."

3. If we can learn to be flexible and help each other, we can balance the load and relieve stress on family members.

Other Resources

4-H-FS-3403 -

Different Folks - An excellent film depicting a family with non-traditional roles. Mother is a veterinarian and father is an illustrator of children's books who works at home and does the major portion of the housework. Children Judy and Matt are assigned a variety of household tasks. Discussion questions are included in the viewers' guide.

MY FAMILY: WHO DOES WHAT?

YOU'LL NEED: A pencil
Chart below

Decide who does the following tasks in your family. What changes could be made?

TASK	PERSON WHO DOES IT	CHANGE THAT COULD BE MADE
Who does home repair?		
Who does laundry?		
Who does the cooking?		
Who do members go to for comfort?		
Who takes care of family members who are sick?		
Who does the grocery shopping?		
Who does dishes?		
Who earns the family income?		
Who plans family activities?		
Who does the car maintenance?		
Who does the decorating?		
Who adds humor at down times?		
Who drives children to activities?		
Who talks about family values?		
Who finds a baby-sitter or child care?		

TASK (continued)	PERSON WHO DOES IT	CHANGE DESIRED
Who helps the family talk about "tough stuff"?		
Who does the clothes shopping?		
Who cleans the house?		
Who takes the children to the doctor?		
Who asks family members how they are feeling?		
Who sets the rules?		
Who makes final decisions?		
Who plays with the children?		
Who does the lawn care?		
Who does the gardening?		
Who helps the children dress?		
Who bathes the children?		
Who does the farm work?		
Who cleans the garage?		
Who shovels the snow?		
Who provides spiritual leadership?		
Who provides encouragement for education?		
Who's always there when someone needs "someone?"		

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